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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 000200

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/29/2017

TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: AIR TIGERS RAID COLOMBO; SUSPECTED LTTE
CADRES KILL 21 VILLAGERS

REF: 08 COLOMBO 983

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE D'AFFAIRES JAMES R. MOORE.
REASONS: 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (SBU) On February 20 at about 21:45 local time, two LTTE aircraft attacked Colombo. The government of Sri Lanka reacted quickly to activate the air defense system in Colombo, cutting electric power while high-intensity spotlights searched the sky. Shortly thereafter, the security forces activated anti-aircraft batteries located throughout the city. The first plane crashed into the Inland Revenue Department (IRD) building in downtown Colombo, setting it on fire. According to the pro-LTTE website TamilNet, the intended target for this plane was the nearby Air Force Headquarters; however, Air Force contacts told DATT that the plane had passed by SLAF headquarters en route to the IRD building. According to media reports, two civilians were killed by falling anti-aircraft fire in the incidents. About 50 were reported injured. Consular section confirmed that no AmCits were hurt in the raid. The TransAsia hotel, adjacent to the Revenue Department building, sustained minor damage. The second plane came close to, but failed to reach its target, Katunayake Air Force base in the Colombo suburbs, immediately adjacent to the international airport. Ground fire brought the plane down in a field just short of the air base's perimeter fence. The plane was carrying 146 kg of C-4 explosive, which failed to detonate on impact. The Sri Lankan military reported finding the pilot's body nearby.

¶2. (C) Despite the military's success in shooting down one of the planes at Katunayake, the attack demonstrated that the planes are still able to take off from short strips of cleared land within the small remaining area of LTTE-controlled territory. Both planes followed a similar path to the LTTE's last air raid in October 2008 (ref A), departing the Tiger-held Vanni and traveling along Sri Lanka's western coast before reaching Colombo. Despite being picked up by Indian-provided radars in northern Sri Lanka, and by an infrared camera after the first plane passed the Colombo port area, the Air Force was unable to intercept and shoot down the planes before they reached Colombo. According to a trusted Embassy source, the LTTE likely now has approximately three planes remaining and the pilots to fly them.

13. (U) In a separate incident on February 22, suspected LTTE cadres attacked Karametiya village along the Ampara-Moneragala district border in Sri Lanka's east. 21 villagers were killed in the attack, including three children and two Civil Defense Force members. Police reported that the attackers stormed the village and fired indiscriminately, planting mines before leaving. The LTTE, as per its customary practice, has not acknowledged responsibility for this attack on civilians.

Moore